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RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC PRIORITY
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 2647
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 2791
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 6100
RUEHUNV/USMISSION UNVIE VIENNA PRIORITY 1472

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 05 KABUL 002970

SIPDIS

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S/CT FOR PALMER/KILCULLEN
SCA/FO, SCA/A, SCA/RA, SCA/PB
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR AID/ANE, AID/DCHA/DG
NSC FOR AHARRIMAN
OSD FOR BREZINSKI
CENTCOM FOR CFC-A, CG CJTF-76, POLAD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/01/2016

TAGS: PTER PREL MOPS AF PK

SUBJECT: NDS DIRECTOR SALEH ON INSURGENCY - CAUSES AND
SOLUTIONS

REF: KABUL 2703

Classified By: AMBASSADOR RONALD NEUMANN FOR REASONS 1.4 (B), (D)

¶1. (S/Rel Aus and GB) Summary: NDS Director General Amarrullah Saleh told visiting S/CT Deputy Coordinator and Chief Strategist on June 27 that the Taliban insurgency is now focused largely on Zabul, Helmand, Kandahar, and Uruzgan. For the moment it is still a "measurable problem," he said. Saleh asserted that the Pakistani ISI had the capability to round up Taliban leadership on its side of the border and do more to prevent infiltration, but lacked the political will to do so. End Summary.

¶2. (S/Rel Aus and GB) Asked for his assessment of the current situation, Saleh took exception to media reports asserting that Afghanistan was losing ground. He praised GOA-Coalition coordination in Operation Mountain Lion and in Paktika, Paktia and Khost provinces. He said meaningful Taliban activity was now largely confined to Zabul, Helmand, Kandahar, and Uruzgan. On the Pakistan side of the border, he declared, the insurgency in Baluchistan was mostly just "criminality," with the insurgents attacking energy and other government facilities rather than trying to destabilize the government. He noted that the terrorists who are directing insurgent operations in Afghanistan have diversified their funding from charities and foreign sources (although these are still a factor) by effectively taxing narcotics dealers, poppy growers, and local businessmen.

¶13. (S/Rel Aus and GB) Saleh attributed the Taliban push in Durrani tribal areas (the four southern provinces) to a desire to embarrass and distract the President, who as a Durrani (Popalzai) himself feels a special sense of responsibility for casualties there, many of whom are his kinsmen. Saleh said that the insurgent leaders are deliberately concentrating on Karzai's home territory in order to cause a crisis of leadership in Kabul, by putting this tremendous pressure on Karzai.

¶14. (S/Rel Aus and GB) Saleh pointed out, however, that there are underlying reasons as well for why the insurgency is stronger in the south. These are rooted in the lack of governance there. Noting that there are no political parties or jihadi groups in the south, he said that the Taliban in that area used to function as an umbrella over tribal differences. When the Taliban collapsed, the tribes were reinstated, initially based on power sharing between the tribal heads. But then reform removed the power brokers (i.e. warlords), and the vacuum has been filled by the Taliban. In the areas where they are now trying to amass support, Taliban are promoting a program consisting of Taliban politics, Koranic law, recruitment of tribes, and a drug economy. This appeals to villagers, Saleh claimed, who have trouble understanding a modern polity that is more sophisticated but less immediate in solving their problems.

¶15. (S/Rel Aus and GB) The problem is less pressing

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in other parts of the country, he claimed. In Loya Paktia (Paktia, Paktika, and Khost), the Ghilzai tribal leaders are less susceptible to Taliban Durrani influence. The Haqqani network has been largely contained. In Khost and Paktia the GOA/CF have good intelligence sources and good security. On the other side of the border, in Waziristan, Pakistan has deployed troops. Saleh pointed out that literacy rates are also higher in that area, especially in Khost. Many Afghans from that region have overseas ties, with relatives working in the Gulf and elsewhere. That gives them a better perspective of the world and they are less likely to be taken in by Taliban ways of thinking. Jalalabad is similar: Ghilzai, with a relatively good economy and higher literacy rates. Saleh pointed out that the Taliban were never strong in the Jalalabad area. Konar and Nuristan, on the other hand, could become worse if the Taliban shifted their efforts there. There is a strong Wahabi undercurrent in those provinces which could be used by the Taliban to their advantage. However, at the moment the Taliban have chosen to concentrate on the south for the reasons described above.

¶16. (S/Rel Aus and GB) Saleh attributed current instability in Afghanistan both to the GOA's slowness in asserting government authority but also to interference from Pakistan, and specifically from ISI. Asked why Pakistan should want to destabilize Afghanistan, Saleh quickly ticked off a few possibilities: "geopolitics, a desire for a monopoly on natural resources, a desire to dominate Afghanistan, or a sense that a strong Afghanistan would undermine Pakistani national unity." He claimed that, contrary to what many people think, the Pakistan government does not feel threatened by Islamic extremists inside Pakistan. He said that Pakistani leaders from Benazir Bhutto to the present have used the threat of an Islamic takeover to get what they wanted from the West, but that there was never any real possibility of it, and that hasn't

changed.

¶ 7. (S/Rel Aus and GB) Pressed as to which officers or branches of the ISI might be complicit in allowing Taliban/AQ infiltration into Afghanistan, Saleh replied, "The ISI is a very disciplined, nationalistic service." (Comment: the implication was that the ISI was acting on orders, not functioning as a rogue entity. End comment.) He said the ISI's Afghanistan desk, including its training and supplies division, was still active. Saleh dismissed GOP operational coordination. "We give them actionable intelligence, primarily on the Quetta shura," he said, including for example recently geospatial coordinates for Mullah Dadullah, "but no action is ever taken." Saleh said he attended the meeting at which President Karzai passed the dossier on several Quetta-based Taliban leaders to President Musharraf, but there had been no follow up. "When we give them target lists, we are always told the phone numbers are incorrect and a day or two later we find they have been disconnected." Saleh said the ISI had turned over only "two or three" Taliban operatives, none of whom

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proved significant after interrogation.

¶ 8. (S/Rel Aus and GB) Saleh professed ignorance of President Musharraf's FATA Plan. When the S/CT visitors outlined it for him, he asserted repeatedly that plans like this were meaningless -- "it is a question of political will." He said that the Pakistanis have enough resources to contain the Taliban or to reduce it to the level of criminality, but that "they will use the excuse of lack of resources to justify failure, as they have done in the past." Saleh decried the lack of strategic consultations with Pakistan on issues of mutual concern such as the border, water, and ethnic problems. When asked whether the Government of Afghanistan was ready to agree to strategic discussions on the political level, he replied: "From what I have heard from President Karzai, there is willingness. But when he wants to engage Musharraf at a strategic level, Musharraf talks at the tactical level." If the U.S. wants to initiate a high-level strategic forum similar to the Trilateral Military Commission, Saleh asserted, "It will make a difference."

¶ 9. (S/Rel Aus and GB) Saleh said the members of the international community need to reassure Karzai of their nation's commitment to Afghanistan. He said that Karzai fears the international community's - and particularly the U.S. - commitment to Afghanistan is decreasing for two reasons: because of what he reads in the Western media and, more importantly, because the ANA is still not able to function independently. Karzai is frustrated with the rate of growth of the ANA, Saleh said. Moreover, he has the perception that when there is a security incident, GOA authorities cannot be deployed immediately to restore order. (CFC-A note: The ANA can and has deployed ANA forces immediately, particularly during the May riots. End note.) Saleh said that recently the President became angry when he asked Defense Minister Wardak to send a platoon to Dai Kundi and was told that all ANA moves have to be coordinated with LTG Eikenberry. (CFC-A note: ANA movements do not need to be coordinated with LTG Eikenberry. End note. Embassy comment: It may be that Saleh was referring to the ANA's lack of airlift capability. End comment.)

¶ 10. (S/Rel Aus and GB) Saleh also argued for

reinstatement of deployment pay for the Afghan National Army (ANA). ANA desertions had begun to decrease, he said, but since the \$2/day hardship allowance was discontinued, they have increased again. (Note: CFC-A/CSTC-A note: ANA desertion rates have remained relatively constant for the last six months.) Finally, Saleh complained about the lack of ANA airlift capability. (CFC-A Comment: The current airlift fleet consisting of a few AN-12s and AN-32s, plus Soviet helos, is inadequate for the growing ANA. But the Afghans are doing the best they can with old aircraft that are terribly difficult to maintain. By late Fall, they will achieve Presidential airlift capability. But in order to achieve the air mobility effects the ANA needs, an increase in the size of the fleet, and

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modernization to sustainable airframes, is needed.
End comment.)

¶11. (S/Rel Aus and GB) With regard to the Afghan National Police (ANP), Saleh complained progress was too slow. He said he strongly supported the use of "arbakei" (community police) in some Pashtun areas where they are a traditional institution. The arbakei are practically responsible for law and order at the most local level, he said. In the years before the wars, they used to do neighborhood protection and would safeguard the king's forest. Using them now for community protection would give the local tribes prestige and would be consistent with traditional practice. Saleh claimed that the arbakei are effective because they are locally-based and rooted in Pashtun culture. For example, if a member of the arbakai is killed, "badal" (a Pashtunwali concept of compensatory justice) requires revenge; if an ANP patrolman is killed it's not the same. "To the local people the ANP patrolman is just a name. He does not have a face and does not need to be avenged."

¶12. (S/Rel Aus and GB) Pressed by polmilloff, Saleh acknowledged that militia were inappropriate in areas where arbakei did not traditionally exist, such as the southern Pashtun provinces, but said something similar should be created there, at the local, tribal level. He also said that the arbakei must be put under "central command and control" to prevent abuses. The Ministry of Interior made a tactical error, he asserted, by announcing support for community police without first working out the details. "It's easy to bring the arbakei into a unified command structure. The MOI should have designed the structure and presented it to the international community." (Comment: Despite Saleh's comment, it is not at entirely clear how the arbakei, who are recruited by, and responsible to, local tribal jirgas, could be brought into a unified MOI command structure. End comment.)

Comment

¶13. (S/Rel Aus and GB) Saleh's primary theme in this wide-ranging talk was, "We must not allow confidence in the regime to erode," and therefore we must strike at the root causes. While his analysis of the underlying domestic reaons for recent Taliban activity was in itself thought- provoking, he was particularly interested to push for recognition for what he saw as Pakistan's support for - or at least, insufficient prohibition of - the insurgency's leadership, training, and financial networks on the other side of the border. This tracks with Karzai's recent public position that the international

community needs to "go to the root of the problem," which he defines privately as getting tougher with Pakistan. Several months back Karzai described to General Abizaid the fiasco of trying to share intel with Pakistan in almost exactly the same words as Saleh used with us. While we recognize that the view is very different from the other side of the border (that particular incident is an excellent

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example), Saleh is one of the sharpest, most perceptive analysts in the Afghan government, and his views are influential within leadership circles.

¶14. (S/Rel Aus and GB) On the issue of community police, there is indeed a difference between arbakei and the other forms of militia that have been floated by Karzai recently. In a speech in Baghlan late last week, Karzai said he does not support militias, and that he wants to work within the national police and army to meet the country's security needs. That said, we have indications that in some districts the arbakei are working in close, positive cooperation with the ANP. We cited an example in reftel, where arbakei in a remote part of Logar province are securing the area as part of their tribal duty, in coordination with the ANP, and not for pay. But arbakei do not exist in all parts of the Pashtun area - the Durrani tribes in Helmand, Kandahar, Uruzgan, and Zabul have never had this tradition - so their limited use does not change our view on militias (a broader category than community policy) as potentially destabilizing and going the wrong direction. From his public statement last week as well as his private discussions, Karzai appears to be coming around to this position. End comment.

¶15. (U) S/CT Deputy Coordinator Palmer has cleared this cable.

NEUMANN